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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR WOLFF'S FEBRUARY 21 MEETING WITH
BELGIAN AMBASSADOR VERBEKE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ALEX WOLFF, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: During a February 22, meeting Ambassador Wolff and Belgian Ambassador Johan Verbeke discussed the Human Rights Council, Peacebuilding Commission and U.S.-EU cooperation. Both Ambassadors agreed that the U.S. and EU needed to cooperate more closely to avoid having our mutual interests undermined by the G-77 and others. End summary.

Human Rights Council (HRC)

¶2. (C) Based on a recent EU meeting with UNGA President (PGA) Eliasson, Ambassador Verbeke said he expected the PGA would release a new draft HRC text on February 23. His understanding was that the text would call for 47 members to be elected on the basis of an absolute (vice 2/3) majority. He added that operative paragraph 8 on membership qualifications would reflect stronger language. Verbeke agreed with Ambassador Wolff that Singapore's plan for proposed geographic distribution on the HRC would put WEOG at a distinct disadvantage and complicate efforts to pass country-specific resolutions condemning the worst national violations. Ambassador Wolff noted that country-specific resolutions often pass by a very slim margin - sometimes by a single vote. Skewing the geographic distribution toward non-WEOG countries would disadvantage such important votes. Verbeke also commented that a Swiss-backed provision in operative paragraph 8 to exclude HRC members ex post facto - that is, by a two-thirds vote after they were on board as HRC members - was unlikely to work in practice. Ambassador Wolff concurred, adding that a two-thirds vote to exclude current members needed to show symmetry with a two-thirds vote to elect members from the GA (rather than election by an absolute GA majority). Two-thirds was a far stronger number for election, especially as very few countries would be no-shows or register abstentions. Otherwise, we risked designing a HRC in where it would be relatively easy to get voted on, but practically impossible to get voted off. Both Ambassadors agreed that such an arrangement would be particularly unfortunate because the quality of membership would probably be the most important predictor of a more effective human rights institution.

Peacebuilding Commission

¶3. (C) Demands for equitable geographic distribution were also impeding efforts to start up the Peacebuilding Commission, both agreed. The resolutions that established the PBC did not mandate geographic distribution and their demands had nothing to do with the substantive work of the PBC, but that meant little to the blocs that were now

demanding equal regional representation. "This is a deliberate attack by some developing nations," Verbeke said, adding that it was "an attempt to impose the tyranny of a few on the majority" of UN members. In the case of the PBC, Ambassador Wolff suggested that we needed to do more to get the Africans to speak up.

¶4. (C) Verbeke cautioned that the Africans had unrealistic expectations about the PBC. Many Africans see the PBC as "an instrument for the mobilization of resources." Instead, Verbeke clarified that the PBC would provide advisory guidance on how to address comprehensive issues involved in the complex transition from post-conflict fragility to a stable infrastructure, including by strengthening the private sector, civil society and justice mechanisms.

US-EU Cooperation

¶5. (C) Ambassador Wolff noted that the EU had not always been sending clear messages to UNGA President Eliasson. He said that especially in some UN reform plenaries, such as on the HRC, loud voices were being heard from Egypt, Pakistan, South Africa and other G-77 states. Meanwhile, most EU nations had not spoken at all. In effect, we were leaving the field to the G-77 as a group and South Africa as head of it as well as to strong individual G-77 member states. The U.S. is perceived to be isolated and the EU as a moderate "bridge-builder", but with no united front from the U.S. and EU the West was the net loser. Verbeke agreed and said that in his opinion the EU had gone out of its way to be responsive to the G-77, noting cases on trade at Doha and Gleneagles, but had gotten nothing in return. Verbeke concluded "we in the West need to stand up more for our own interests." Ambassador Wolff concurred saying that given the way the G-77 was behaving in exploiting certain issues and

assaulting our common interests, now was not the time for us to be divided. To the contrary, we needed to maximize cooperation.

¶6. (C) Comment: In the meeting, Verbeke noted his background as a graduate of Yale Law School, followed by private law practice in New York, and earlier diplomatic service as DCM at the Belgium Embassy in Washington. He has been a skillful, articulate co-chair of plenary sessions on ECOSOC reform and development, navigating divisions between the G77 and developed nations with subtlety and a commitment to transparent proceedings. Verbeke was clearly signaling his dissatisfaction with trend of the EU positioning itself at the UN between the US and the developing world. What remains to be seen is whether he (and others) will be able to re-orient the EU in the direction of greater coordination with us. End Comment.
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